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GHOST RIDER™

REVEALED AT LAST-- THE SECRET ORIGIN OF THE DEMON WHO DWELLS WITHIN JOHNNY BLAZE!

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SCOTTIE in A Cracker Jack story
OKAY, SCOTTIE! THE SCORE IS TIED, BASES LOADED, AND TWO OUTS! GET IN THERE AND SHOW 'EM WHAT YOU'RE MADE OF.
COACH
I'LL DO MY BEST, COACH.
15
CRACKER JACK
STRIKE ONE!
¡GULP! WHAT IF I STRIKE OUT?!?!
STRIKE TWO!
YOU CAN DO IT, SCOTTIE!
YOU'RE A CRACKER JACK.
ZOOM!
WHAP!
WHEN YOU'RE REALLY GOOD-THEY CALL YOU CRACKER JACK
CRACK
HOME RUN
YOU DID IT, SCOTTIE.
WE WON THE PLAYOFFS!
WHAT A CRACKER JACK!
Cracker Jack.
CANDIED POPCORN AND PEANUTS
Toy Surprise INSIDE!
BORDEN
NET WT 4¾ OZ
Crunchy caramel-coated popcorn and peanuts and a secret toy surprise!

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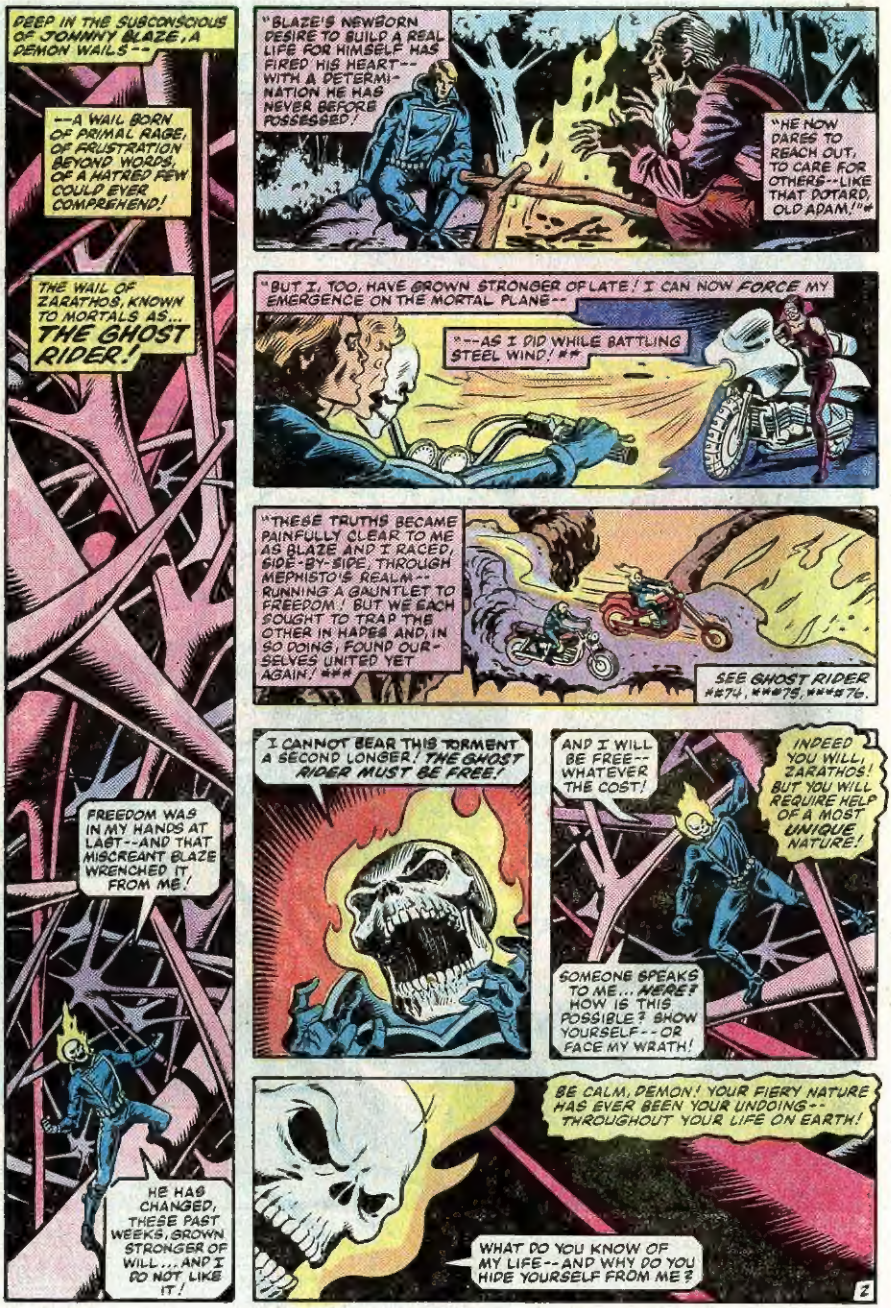
DEEP IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS OF JOHNNY BLAZE, A DEMON WAILS--
--A WAIL BORN OF PRIMAL RAGE, OF FRUSTRATION BEYOND WORDS, OF A HATRED FEW COULD EVER COMPREHEND!
THE WAIL OF ZARATHOS, KNOWN TO MORTALS AS... THE GHOST RIDER!
FREEDOM WAS IN MY HANDS AT LAST--AND THAT MISCREANT BLAZE WRENCHED IT FROM ME!
HE HAS CHANGED, THESE PAST WEEKS, GROWN STRONGER OF WILL... AND I DO NOT LIKE IT!
"BLAZE'S NEWBORN DESIRE TO BUILD A REAL LIFE FOR HIMSELF HAS FIRED HIS HEART--WITH A DETERMINATION HE HAS NEVER BEFORE POSSESSED!
"HE NOW DARES TO REACH OUT, TO CARE FOR OTHERS--LIKE THAT DOTARD, OLD ADAM!"*
"BUT I, TOO, HAVE GROWN STRONGER OF LATE! I CAN NOW FORCE MY EMERGENCE ON THE MORTAL PLANE--
"--AS I DID WHILE BATTLING STEEL WIND!"**
"THESE TRUTHS BECAME PAINFULLY CLEAR TO ME AS BLAZE AND I RACED, SIDE-BY-SIDE, THROUGH MEPHISTO'S REALM--RUNNING A GAUNTLET TO FREEDOM! BUT WE EACH SOUGHT TO TRAP THE OTHER IN HADES AND, IN SO DOING, FOUND OURSELVES UNITED YET AGAIN!"***
SEE GHOST RIDER #74, **#75, ***#76.
I CANNOT BEAR THIS TORMENT A SECOND LONGER! THE GHOST RIDER MUST BE FREE!
AND I WILL BE FREE--WHATEVER THE COST!
INDEED YOU WILL, ZARATHOS! BUT YOU WILL REQUIRE HELP OF A MOST UNIQUE NATURE!
SOMEONE SPEAKS TO ME... HERE? HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE? SHOW YOURSELF--OR FACE MY WRATH!
BE CALM, DEMON! YOUR FIERY NATURE HAS EVER BEEN YOUR UNDOING--THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE ON EARTH!
WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF MY LIFE--AND WHY DO YOU HIDE YOURSELF FROM ME?
2

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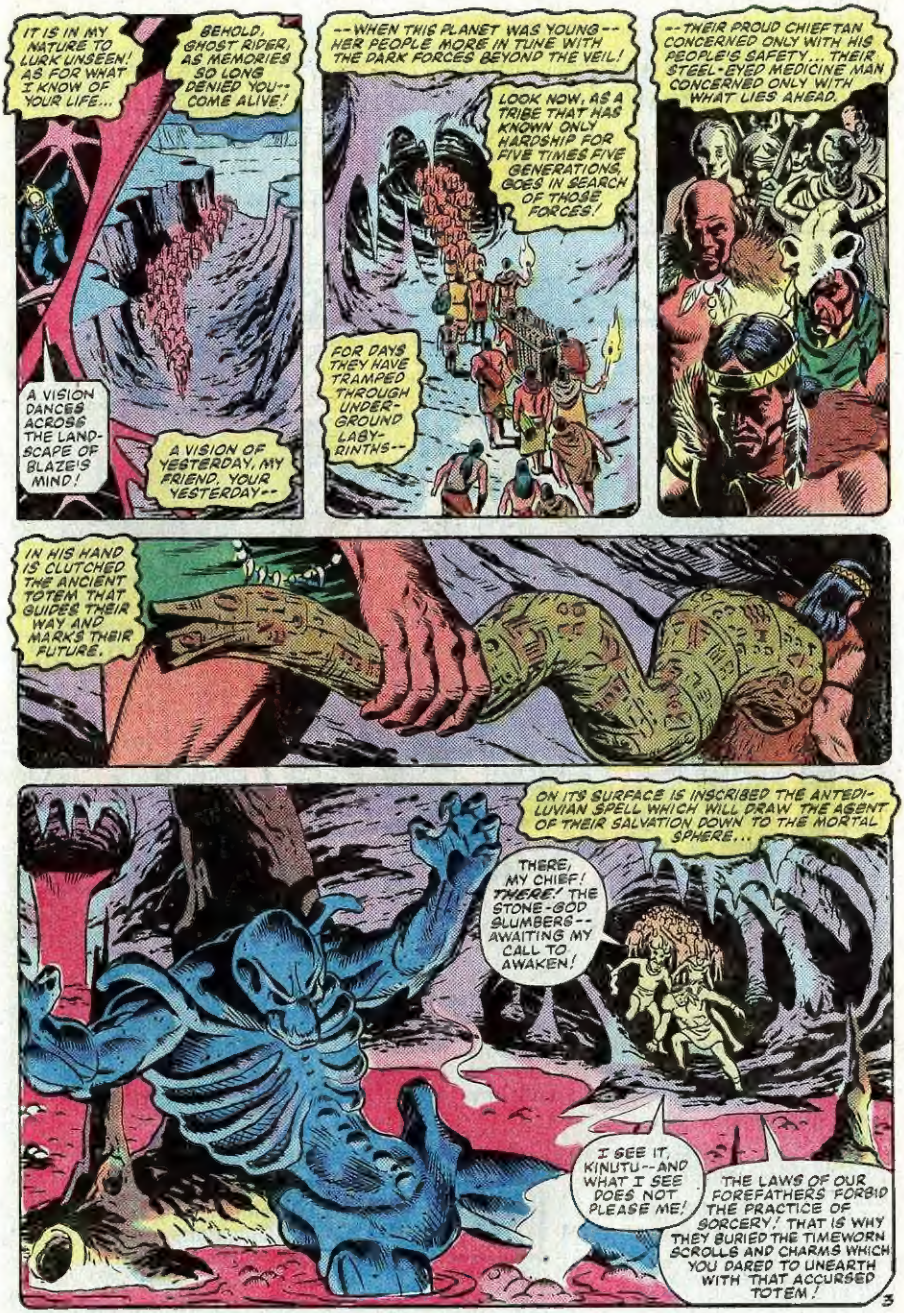
IT IS IN MY NATURE TO LURK UNSEEN! AS FOR WHAT I KNOW OF YOUR LIFE...
BEHOLD, GHOST RIDER, AS MEMORIES SO LONG DENIED YOU-- COME ALIVE!
A VISION DANCES ACROSS THE LAND-SCAPE OF BLAZE'S MIND!
A VISION OF YESTERDAY, MY FRIEND, YOUR YESTERDAY--
--WHEN THIS PLANET WAS YOUNG-- HER PEOPLE MORE IN TUNE WITH THE DARK FORCES BEYOND THE VEIL!
LOOK NOW, AS A TRIBE THAT HAS KNOWN ONLY HARDSHIP FOR FIVE TIMES FIVE GENERATIONS, GOES IN SEARCH OF THOSE FORCES!
FOR DAYS THEY HAVE TRAMPED THROUGH UNDER-GROUND LABY-RINTHS--
--THEIR PROUD CHIEFTAN CONCERNED ONLY WITH HIS PEOPLE'S SAFETY... THEIR STEEL-EYED MEDICINE MAN CONCERNED ONLY WITH WHAT LIES AHEAD.
IN HIS HAND IS CLUTCHED THE ANCIENT TOTEM THAT GUIDES THEIR WAY AND MARKS THEIR FUTURE.
ON ITS SURFACE IS INSCRIBED THE ANTEDI-LUVIAN SPELL WHICH WILL DRAW THE AGENT OF THEIR SALVATION DOWN TO THE MORTAL SPHERE...
THERE, MY CHIEF! THERE! THE STONE-GOD SLUMBERS-- AWAITING MY CALL TO AWAKEN!
I SEE IT, KINUTU-- AND WHAT I SEE DOES NOT PLEASE ME!
THE LAWS OF OUR FOREFATHERS FORBID THE PRACTICE OF SORCERY, THAT IS WHY THEY BURIED THE TIMEWORN SCROLLS AND CHARMS WHICH YOU DARED TO UNEARTH WITH THAT ACCURSED TOTEM!
3

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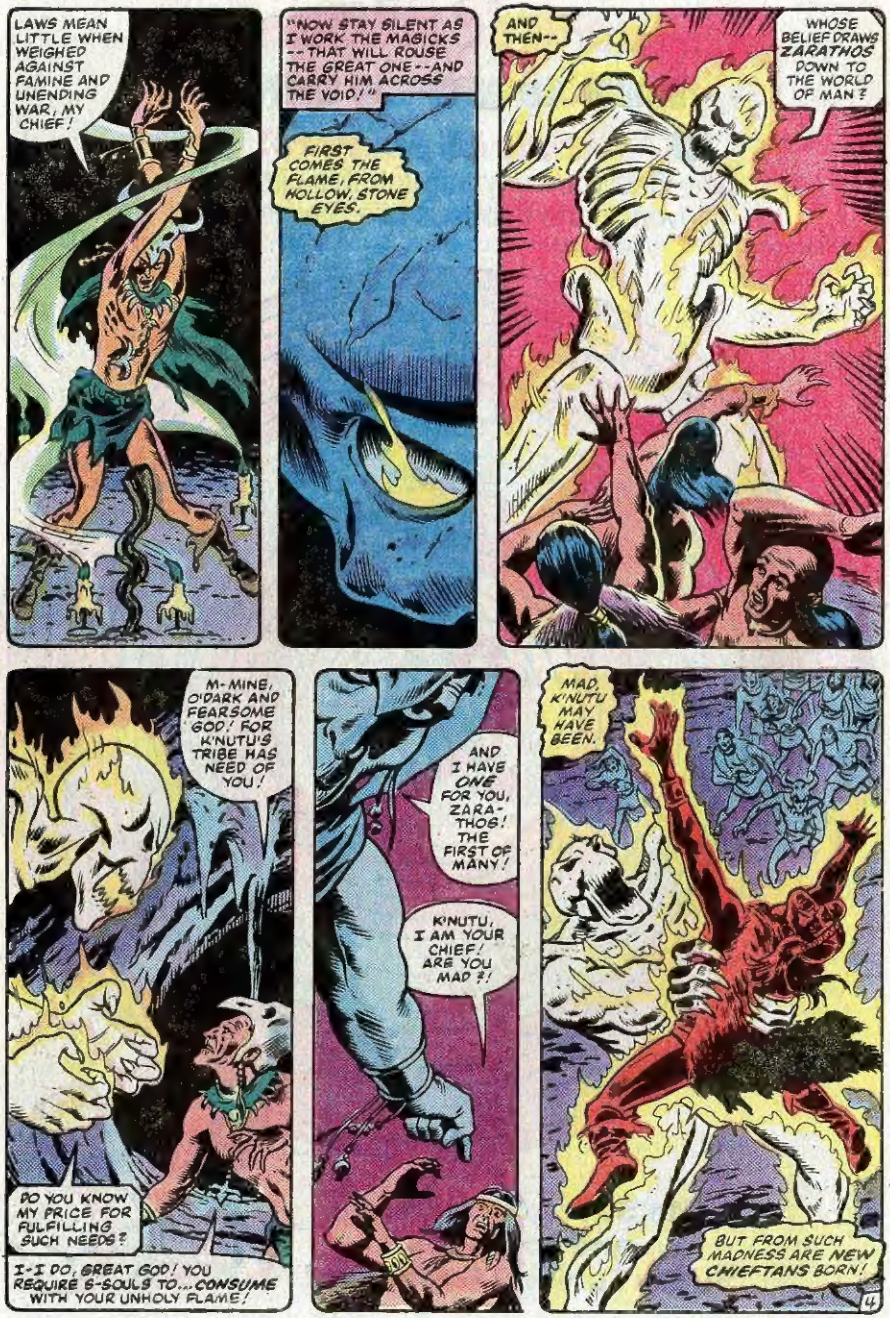
LAWS MEAN LITTLE WHEN WEIGHED AGAINST FAMINE AND UNENDING WAR, MY CHIEF!
"NOW STAY SILENT AS I WORK THE MAGICKS -- THAT WILL ROUSE THE GREAT ONE--AND CARRY HIM ACROSS THE VOID!"
FIRST COMES THE FLAME, FROM HOLLOW, STONE EYES.
AND THEN--
WHOSE BELIEF DRAWS ZARATHOS DOWN TO THE WORLD OF MAN?
M-MINE, O'DARK AND FEARSOME GOD! FOR K'NUTU'S TRIBE HAS NEED OF YOU!
DO YOU KNOW MY PRICE FOR FULFILLING SUCH NEEDS?
I-I DO, GREAT GOD! YOU REQUIRE 6-SOULS TO... CONSUME WITH YOUR UNHOLY FLAME!
AND I HAVE ONE FOR YOU, ZARATHOS! THE FIRST OF MANY!
K'NUTU, I AM YOUR CHIEF! ARE YOU MAD?!
MAD, K'NUTU MAY HAVE BEEN.
BUT FROM SUCH MADNESS ARE NEW CHIEFTANS BORN!
4

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FROM THAT DAY FORTH, K'NUTU'S TRIBE EXCHANGED DEFEAT AND HUNGER--FOR CONQUEST AND FEAST! ZARATHOS FED THEM UNEQUALLED MIGHT--
--WHILE THEY, IN TURN, FED HIM... THEIR CAPTIVES!
AND, AS THE NEWLY-FOUNDED CULT OF ZARATHOS MUSHROOMED, SO DID THE BELIEF THAT SUSTAINED THE DEMON. SO, TOO, DID HIS POWER.
BUT SUCH POWER CANNOT GO LONG UNNOTICED...
THIS ZARATHOS DESTROYS SOULS THAT SHOULD, BY RIGHTS, BELONG TO THE LORDS OF HADES! HE SEEKS A SEA OF FOLLOWERS TO RIVAL OURS, AS WELL!
PERHAPS THESE FACTS HAVE ESCAPED SATAN, THOG, SATANNISH, AND THE REST--
--BUT MEPHISTO SEES ALL!
I SHALL BRING THIS ARROGANT DEMON DOWN!
AND THERE, ON EARTH, ARE THE TWO WHO SHALL BE MY PAWNS! THROUGH THEM I SHALL END ZARATHOS'S REIGN ON EARTH!
LOOK AT THEM! A PRINCE AND HIS PRINCESS--SO DEEPLY IN LOVE! SO MUCH AT PEACE!
5

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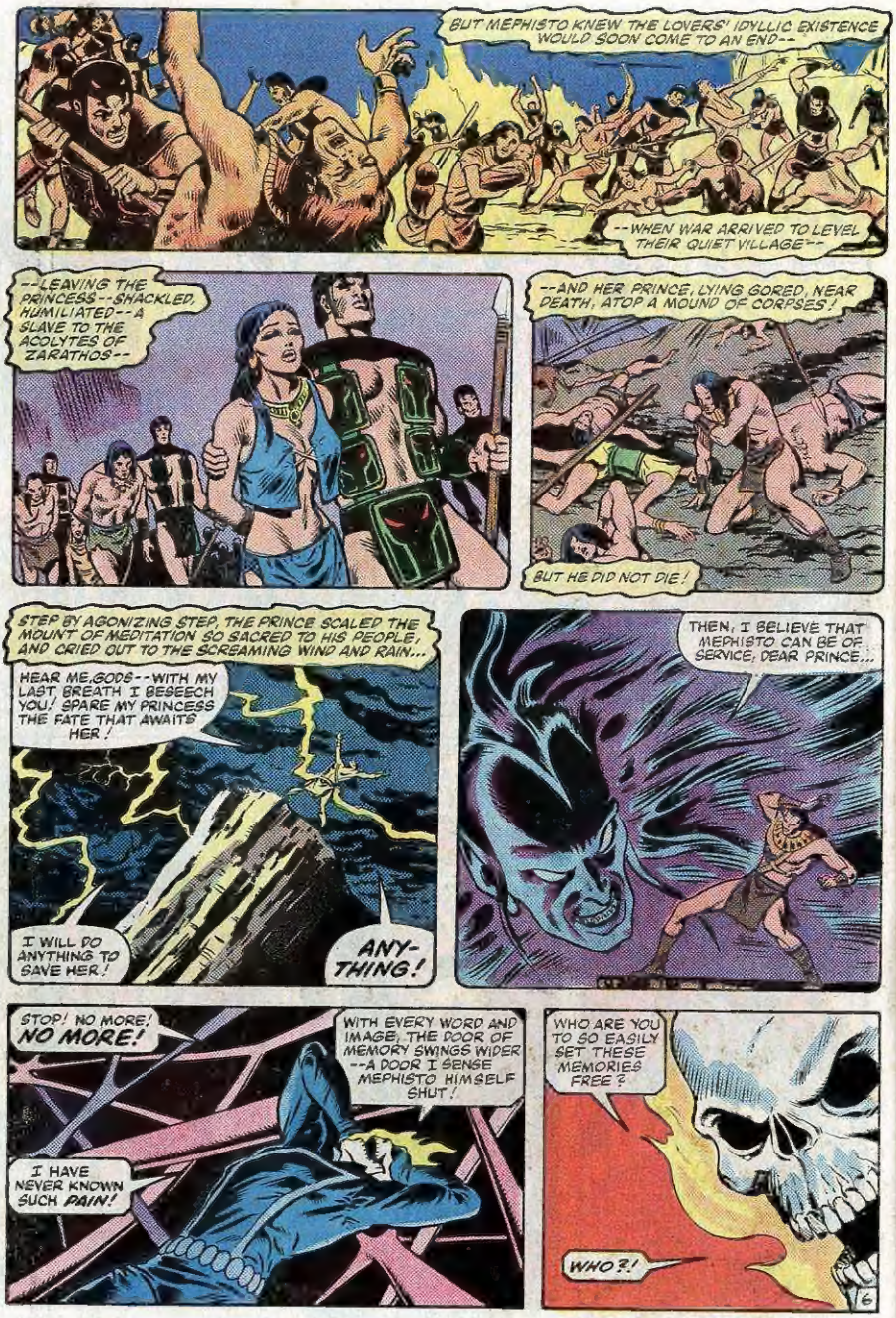
BUT MEPHISTO KNEW THE LOVERS' IDYLLIC EXISTENCE WOULD SOON COME TO AN END--
--WHEN WAR ARRIVED TO LEVEL THEIR QUIET VILLAGE--
--LEAVING THE PRINCESS--SHACKLED, HUMILIATED--A SLAVE TO THE ACOLYTES OF ZARATHOS--
--AND HER PRINCE, LYING GORED, NEAR DEATH, ATOP A MOUND OF CORPSES!
BUT HE DID NOT DIE!
STEP BY AGONIZING STEP, THE PRINCE SCALED THE MOUNT OF MEDITATION SO SACRED TO HIS PEOPLE, AND CRIED OUT TO THE SCREAMING WIND AND RAIN...
HEAR ME, GODS--WITH MY LAST BREATH I BESEECH YOU! SPARE MY PRINCESS THE FATE THAT AWAITS HER!
I WILL DO ANYTHING TO SAVE HER!
ANY-THING!
THEN, I BELIEVE THAT MEPHISTO CAN BE OF SERVICE, DEAR PRINCE...
STOP! NO MORE! NO MORE!
WITH EVERY WORD AND IMAGE, THE DOOR OF MEMORY SWINGS WIDER --A DOOR I SENSE MEPHISTO HIMSELF SHUT!
I HAVE NEVER KNOWN SUCH PAIN!
WHO ARE YOU TO SO EASILY SET THESE MEMORIES FREE?
WHO?!
6

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JOHNNY BLAZE WITH A START...
AT LEAST I'M FREE! I CAN GET THE BIKE AND GET BACK TO THE CARNIVAL
NOT THAT THINGS'LL BE ANY DIFFERENT ONCE I'M THERE! LET'S FACE IT, MY WHOLE LIFE IS ONE UNENDING NIGHTMARE
SIMON BLAZE — PUT A CURSE ON THE SELF-STYLED "GHOST RIDER" AND THE FILM WERE FILMED IN DEMONTOWN REALM
IT'S THAT YOU'VE GOT MORE INNER STRENGTH THAN YOU EVER REALIZED
IT'S THE DEMONIC FORCE USING THAT STRENGTH
WHAT IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN...?
THE VOICE THAT CALLED TO BLAZE SOUNDS LIKE THE FACE THAT SO WHEELS BLAZE HAS EVER HATED
THE GREAT VINCENZO
A MAN SUPPOSEDLY MURDERED SEVERAL DAYS EARLIER, BY THE MANIACAL "STEEL WIND"!
YET BLAZE CANNOT SEE THE REAL FACE OF THE "GHOST RIDER" FACE THAT HANGS AGAINST THE STARRY SKY.
SMOKE!
I DON'T KNOW ANY BETTER TO SWEAR THAT REALLY WAS VINCENZO
BUT HE'S DEAD... STEEL WIND MADE THAT CLEAR ENOUGH

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BUT, FROM THE LOOKS OF THIS RUN-DOWN OLD HOTEL-- THERE HASN'T BEEN A SOUL HERE IN YEARS!
SO... WHY IS THERE A DIM LIGHT ON, UP IN THE ATTIC?
ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT, I GUESS
WITH THAT SOUL-SUCKING SCUM, CENTURIOUS!*
WHAT HAVE WE HERE? A DUMBWAITER? I--
I'D CHANGE MY MIND IF YOU NEED ME
AND IF YOU NEED ME, BUDDY--
WHAM
YOU'VE GOT ME
NOTHING BUT A BARE LIGHTBULB, A LOT OF COB-WEB COVERED CRATES AND--
UHHHH!
WHAT WAS THAT?
BOUNDED INTO A TERRIFIED AN IMAL WHO WAS HIDING OVER THERE IN THE
OH MY GOD OH!

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"VINCENZO!!"
IT'S ALL RIGHT, VINCENZO. I'M HERE. CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED?
TH-THEY TOOK ME AWAY.. DID THINGS TO ME... O-OPE- A-ED ON... MY BRAIN!
OH, JOHNNY... SO MANY THOUGHTS. SO MANY SOUNDS... MY BRAIN IS ON FIRE!
WHOEVER DID THIS MADE ONE MAJOR MISTAKE -- THEY GAVE YOU THE POWER TO CALL
YOU HAVE MADE THE ERROR, MR. BLAZE. VINCENZO DID NOT CALL YOU. I DID.
NO!
WHO'S THERE!!
KLIK
THE ANSWER COMES WITH A BURST OF LIGHT.
9

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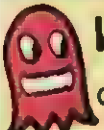

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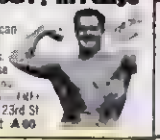

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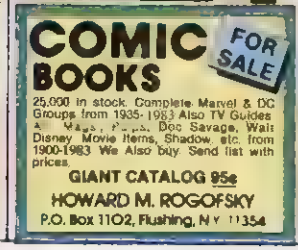

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SPIDER-MAN
AND THE MYSTERY OF THE MUSEUM SNAKES!
I HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING, SPIDEY-- LEAVING THOSE STRANGE MAGIC SNAKE PUZZLES BEHIND IN THE MUSEUM EXHIBIT!
TRUST ME. IT'S THE BEST TRAP I CAN THINK OF TO CATCH THAT CRAFTY, DEVIOUS MAGMA MIND
LATER...
SEE BOSS THE PUZZLE NEVER FIGURE OUT HOW WE GOT THE DIAMOND WITHOUT TRIPPING THE ALARM!
HA-HA! I'M THE GREATEST CRIMINAL BRAIN-- I CAN'T RESIST A REAL CHALLENGE THE TOUGHER THE BETTER!
WAIT-- WHAT'S THIS... A PUZZLE! HMM...
LET'S SEE HOW FAST I CAN PUT IT BACK INTO "BALL" SHAPE. IT SHOULD BE SIMPLE FOR ME TO SOLVE!
HOURS LATER...
THIS IS HARDER THAN I THOUGHT! EACH SHAPE I MAKE IS MORE INTRIGUING THAN THE LAST!
HURRY, BOSS! IT'S GETTING LATE!
YEAH, I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN BOSS... I'M HOOKED TOO!
YOU'LL BOTH HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO WORK IT OUT-- BEHIND BARS!
SPIDER-MAN!
THWIP!
THWIP!
THWIP!
EVEN THE WORLD'S SMARTEST CROOK WAS NO MATCH FOR-- THE MAGIC SNAKE™!
THE ORIGINAL Magic Snake PUZZLE
MAGIC SNAKE PUZZLE

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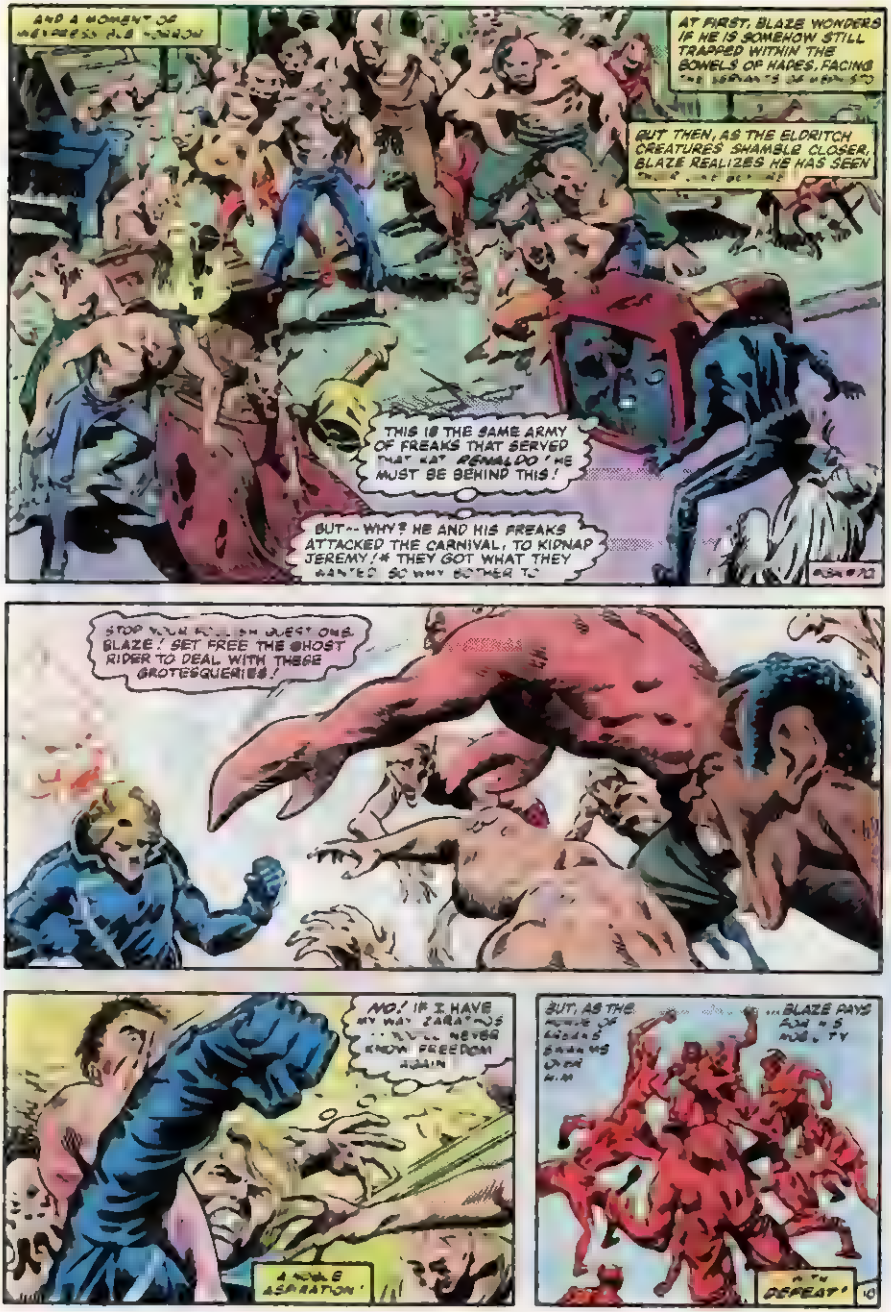
AND A MOMENT OF [illegible]
AT FIRST, BLAZE WONDERS IF HE IS SOMEHOW STILL TRAPPED WITHIN THE BOWELS OF HADES, FACING [illegible]
BUT THEN, AS THE ELDRITCH CREATURES SHAMBLE CLOSER, BLAZE REALIZES HE HAS SEEN [illegible]
THIS IS THE SAME ARMY OF FREAKS THAT SERVED [illegible] SO HE MUST BE BEHIND THIS!
BUT-- WHY? HE AND HIS FREAKS ATTACKED THE CARNIVAL, TO KIDNAP JEREMY! IF THEY GOT WHAT THEY WANTED, SO WHY BOTHER TO
STOP WASTING TIME ON LESSER ONES, BLAZE! SET FREE THE GHOST RIDER TO DEAL WITH THESE GROTESQUERIES!
NO! IF I HAVE MY WAY, ZARATHOS ... I WILL NEVER KNOW FREEDOM AGAIN
A HOLLOW ASPIRATION!
BUT, AS THE [illegible]
... BLAZE PAYS [illegible]
DEFEAT!

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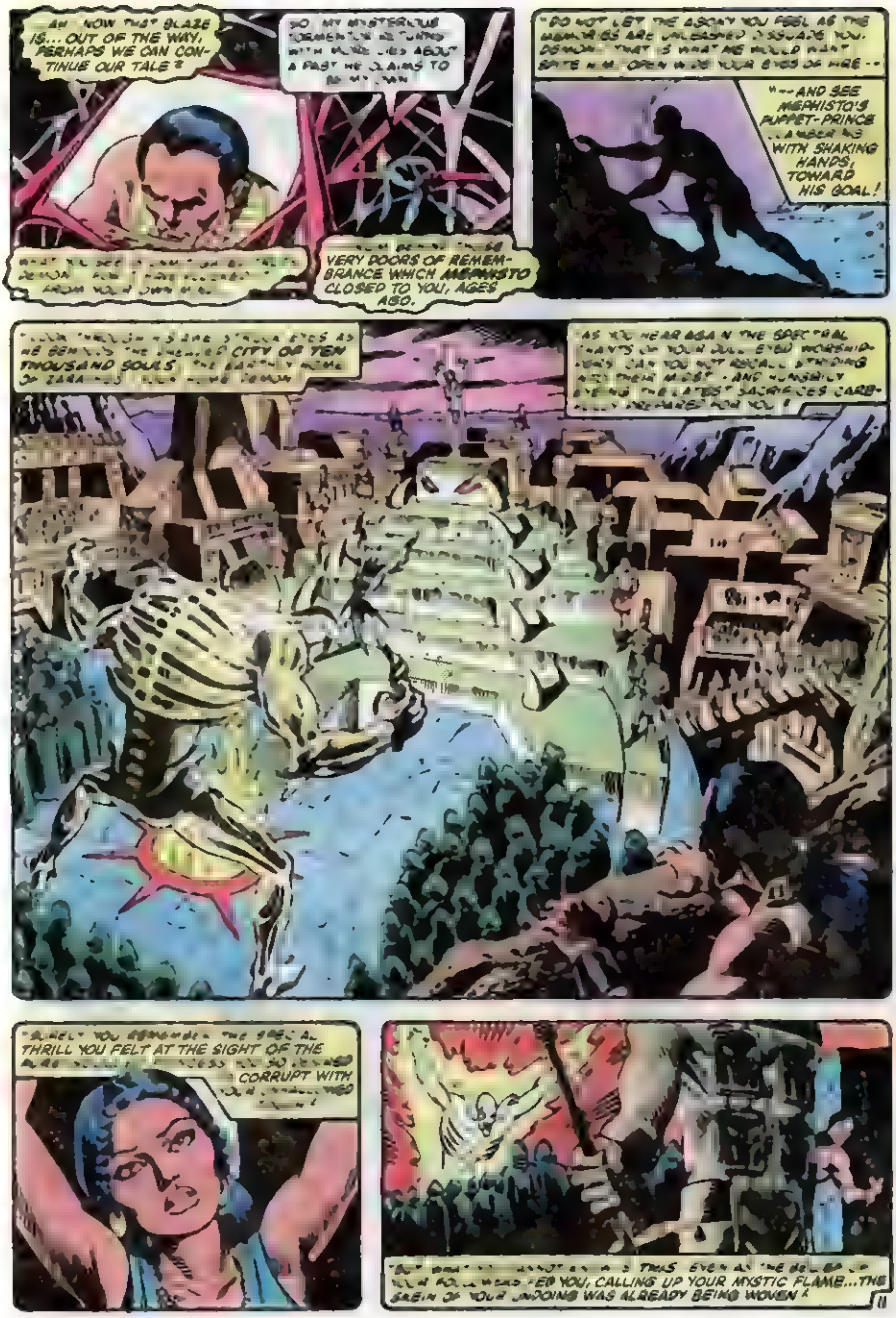
AH NOW THAT BLAZE IS... OUT OF THE WAY, PERHAPS WE CAN CONTINUE OUR TALE?
SO, MY MYSTERIOUS TORMENTOR IS TURNS WITH MORE LIES ABOUT A PAST HE CLAIMS TO BE MY OWN
VERY DOORS OF REMEMBRANCE WHICH MEPHISTO CLOSED TO YOU, AGES AGO.
DO NOT LET THE AGONY YOU FEEL AS THE MEMORIES ARE UNLEASHED DISMAY YOU, DOMINO. THAT IS WHAT HE WOULD WANT. SPITE HIM. OPEN WIDE YOUR EYES OF MIND--
"--AND SEE MEPHISTO'S PUPPET-PRINCE LAMBER AS WITH SHAKING HANDS, TOWARD HIS GOAL!
AS YOU HEAR AGAIN THE SPECTRAL CRIES OF YOUR DEAD BROTHERHOOD, CAN YOU NOT RECALL STANDING WITH THEM MOST, AND HUMBLY OFFERING THE LATEST SACRIFICES CARBONELL INFLICTED FOR YOU?
SURELY YOU REMEMBER THE GREAT THRILL YOU FELT AT THE SIGHT OF THE CORRUPT WITH
THIS EVEN AS THE DOOMED FOLLOWED YOU, CALLING UP YOUR MYSTIC FLAME...THE SEEDS OF YOUR UNDOING WAS ALREADY BEING WOVEN

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"GUIDED BY A STEALTH BORN OF DESPERATION (OR PERHAPS THE ENCHANTMENT OF HIS NEW-FOUND PROTECTOR), THE PRINCE STOLE PAST A DOZEN GUARDS AND SCALED THE SKY-REACHING SACRIFICIAL TOWER
HE COULD HEAR THE SHRIEKS OF HIS FELLOW TRIBESMEN AS ONE-BY-ONE THEIR SOULS WERE OFFERED UP TO YOU
"AND EVEN AS YOU TURNED TOWARD THE ONE THE PRINCE ADORED,
HOLD, DEMON-GOD! MY PRINCESS MUST BE SPARED! IF IT IS A PURE SOUL YOU WISH--
--TAKE MINE INSTEAD!
MORTAL GNAT! ZARATHOS DOES NOT STOOP TO BARGAIN WITH SUCH AS YOU!
I WILL HAVE THE WOMAN'S SOUL-
--AND YOURS AS WELL!
"YOU REACHED OUT. THE PRINCE STOOD FAST. YOUR FINGERS CLOSED.
"BUT HE DID NOT BURN!
"INSTEAD ZARATHOS, YOU BURNED WITH A FIRE OF INDIGNATION AND UTTER DISBELIEF!
"A DISBELIEF THAT SPREAD, AS A CLOUD OF LOCUSTS, OVER YOUR FLOCK--OVER THOSE WHO HAD NEVER BEFORE DOUBTED YOUR POWER
"WITH THAT SEED OF DOUBT, YOUR HOLD ON THIS MORTAL PLANE WAVERED--JUST ENOUGH--
12

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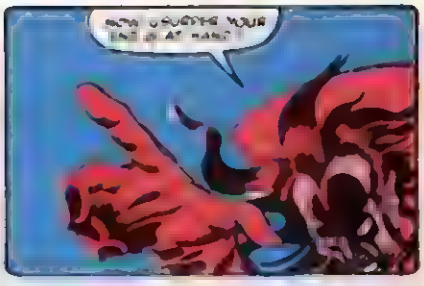

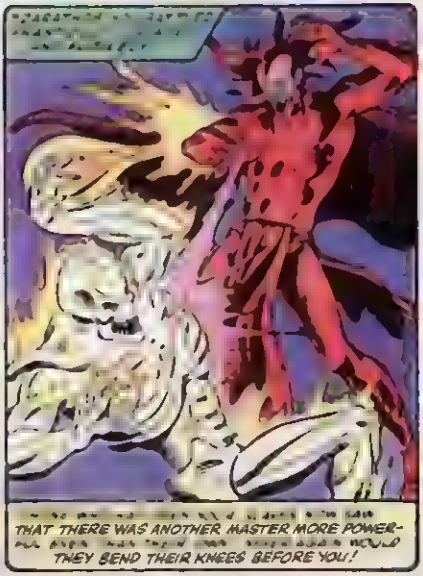

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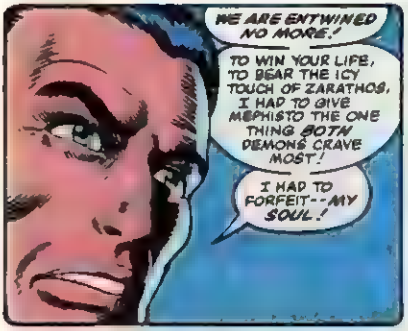
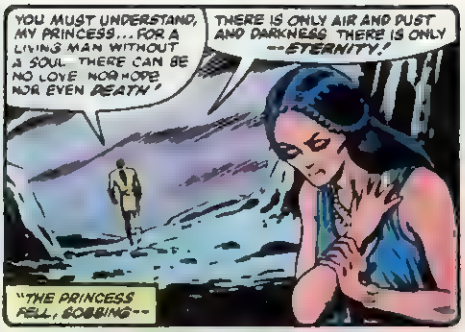
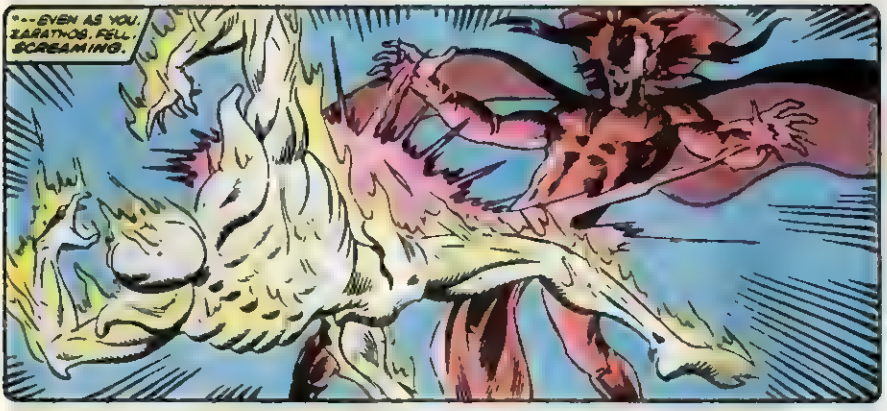
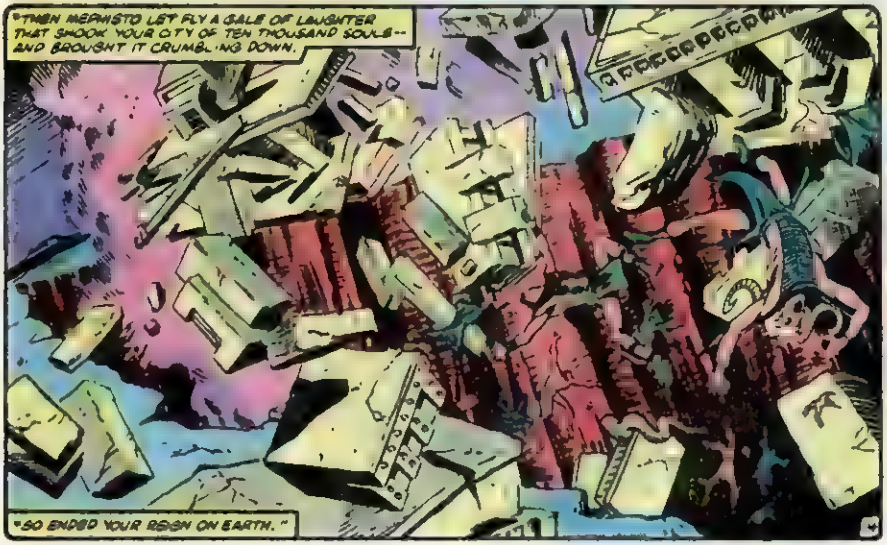

WE ARE ENTWINED NO MORE!
TO WIN YOUR LIFE, TO BEAR THE ICY TOUCH OF ZARATHOS, I HAD TO GIVE MEPHISTO THE ONE THING BOTH DEMONS CRAVE MOST!
I HAD TO FORFEIT--MY SOUL!


YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, MY PRINCESS... FOR A LIVING MAN WITHOUT A SOUL THERE CAN BE NO LOVE NOR HOPE NOR EVEN DEATH"
THERE IS ONLY AIR AND DUST AND DARKNESS THERE IS ONLY --ETERNITY!
"THE PRINCESS FELL, SOBBING--




"THEN MEPHISTO LET FLY A GALE OF LAUGHTER THAT SHOOK YOUR CITY OF TEN THOUSAND SOULS--AND BROUGHT IT CRUMBLING DOWN.
AAAAAAAAAAAA
"SO ENDED YOUR REIGN ON EARTH."

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RETURN DEMON, TO THE STONE FIGURE WHENCE YOU SPRUNG!
BUT LET YOUR LIVING FLAME-- YOUR ABJECT SOUL-- BE MINE TO DO WITH AS I WILL!
TONIGHT, A NEW SLAVE WALKS IN HADES!
YOUR REMAINS I LEAVE TO AIR AND DUST AND DARKNESS. TO ETERNITY...
AYEEEE
TRUE!!
ALL OF IT-- TRUE!!
I KNOW AT LONG LAST WHO I REALLY AM! I KNOW NOW-- WHAT I HAVE LOST!
INDEED, AND I HAVE COME TO HELP YOU REGAIN IT!
YOU! WHAT MANNER OF BEING ARE YOU TO BRING ALL THIS ABOUT?
CREATE YOUR CYCLE OF HELLFIRE, GHOST RIDER-- FOLLOW MY VOICE--
--AND I SHALL STAND REVEALED!
FASTER, DEMON! YOU MUST VAULT THE WALLS OF JOHNNY BLAZE'S SUBCONSCIOUS--
--IF YOU WOULD ENTER THE REALM OF HE WHO IS PRIVY TO THE DARKEST SECRETS OF BOTH MEN--
--AND GODS!
IF YOU WOULD ENTER THE DREAM-DIMENSION OF--
NIGHT-MARE!
15

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INTERLUDE: IN RECENT DAYS SHE'S SEEN SO MANY TOWNS LIKE THIS--SILENT ALMOST SERENE--WITH A PATINA OF INNOCENCE THAT TIME AND A DECADENT WORLD HAVE FAILED TO WASH AWAY.
BUT INNOCENCE IS SOMETHING SHE LOST LONG AGO. SO THE QUESTIONS MUST BE ASKED ONCE MORE
QUENTIN CARNIVAL? YEAH THEY WERE THROUGH HERE 'BOUT A WEEK, WEEK AND A HALF AGO
TOOK MY BOY OVER TO SEE IT HAD A BALL
AND THE BIKER IN THE PICTURE--WAS HE WITH THEM?
MIGHTA BEEN BUT THE DAY HE WENT THERE WAS A WOMAN CALLED STEEL BREEZE OR SOMETHIN MANGLED THAT MOTORCYCLE PRETTY DARN GOOD TOO YOU MISSED 'EM
BUT SHE WILL FIND THEM SHE MUST INTERLUDE ENDS.
MEANWHILE
OOOO I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN RUN OVER BY A MACK TRUCK
HEY WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? WHERE AM I? WHO ARE YOU?
YOU ARE IN A MAKESHIFT OPERATING THEATER, MR BLAZE. I AM YOUR DOCTOR
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
HE IS TALKING ABOUT YOUR FUTURE BLAZE. MY MASTER HAS GRAND PLANS FOR THE QUENTIN CARNIVAL AND YOU FIGURE IN THEM QUITE PROMINENTLY
A-RENALDO I THOUGHT YOU WERE GEH NO WHAT HAPPENED TO VINCENZO!
SO YOU HAVE HALF A BRAIN AS WELL AS A... DEMON AT YOUR COMMAND.
"YOU REMEMBER HOW I LED MY MASTER'S FREAKS INTO YOUR CAMP--AND STOLE THE UNFORTUNATE JEREMY AWAY."
"IN THE ABOVE-MENTIONED GS # 70
"HOW YOU RELEASED YOUR DEMONIC OTHER-SELF--AND HOW HE AID HANDS UPON ME ROASTING MY VERY [illegible] WITH HIS AWFUL FLAME!
BUT YOU CANNOT KNOW WHAT MY LIFE HAS BEEN SINCE THAT NIGHT

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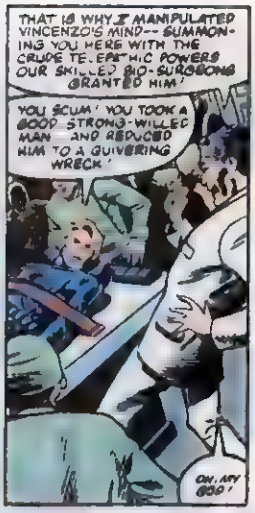
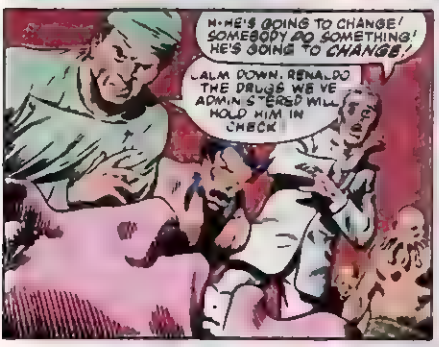
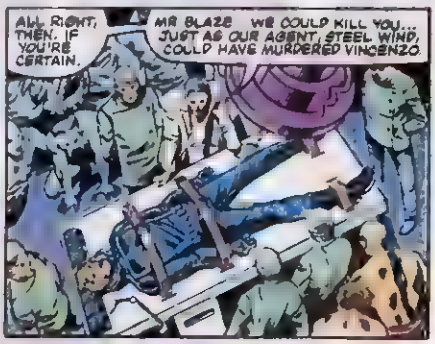
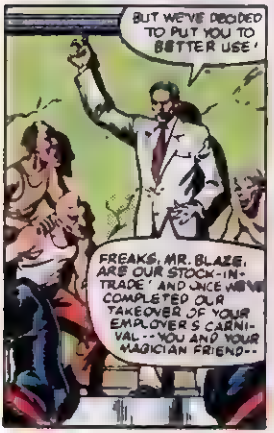
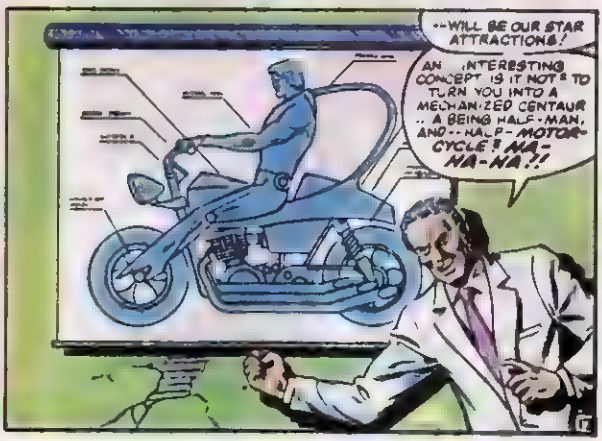
I-- WHO HAVE NEVER KNOWN FEAR-- NOW FIND IT MY CONSTANT COMPANION. FOR THAT ALONE WOULD I SEE YOU DEALT WITH!
BUT YOUR INTERFERENCE HAS TWICE HINDERED MY MASTER'S PLANS AS WELL! AND ME HAS DECREED-- YOUR TRANSFORMATION!


THAT IS WHY I MANIPULATED VINCENZO'S MIND-- SUMMONING YOU HERE WITH THE CRUDE TELEPATHIC POWERS OUR SKILLED BIO-SURGEONS GRANTED HIM!
YOU SCUM! YOU TOOK A GOOD STRONG-WILLED MAN AND REDUCED HIM TO A QUIVERING WRECK!
OH, MY GOD!


H-HE'S GOING TO CHANGE! SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING! HE'S GOING TO CHANGE!
CALM DOWN, RENALDO THE DRUGS WE'VE ADMINISTERED WILL HOLD HIM IN CHECK!




BUT WE'VE DECIDED TO PUT YOU TO BETTER USE!
FREAKS, MR. BLAZE, ARE OUR STOCK-IN-TRADE! AND ONCE WE'VE COMPLETED OUR TAKEOVER OF YOUR EMPLOYER'S CARNIVAL-- YOU AND YOUR MAGICIAN FRIEND--


--WILL BE OUR STAR ATTRACTIONS!
AN INTERESTING CONCEPT IS IT NOT? TO TURN YOU INTO A MECHANIZED CENTAUR .. A BEING HALF-MAN, AND-- HALF-MOTORCYCLE! HA-HA-HA!!

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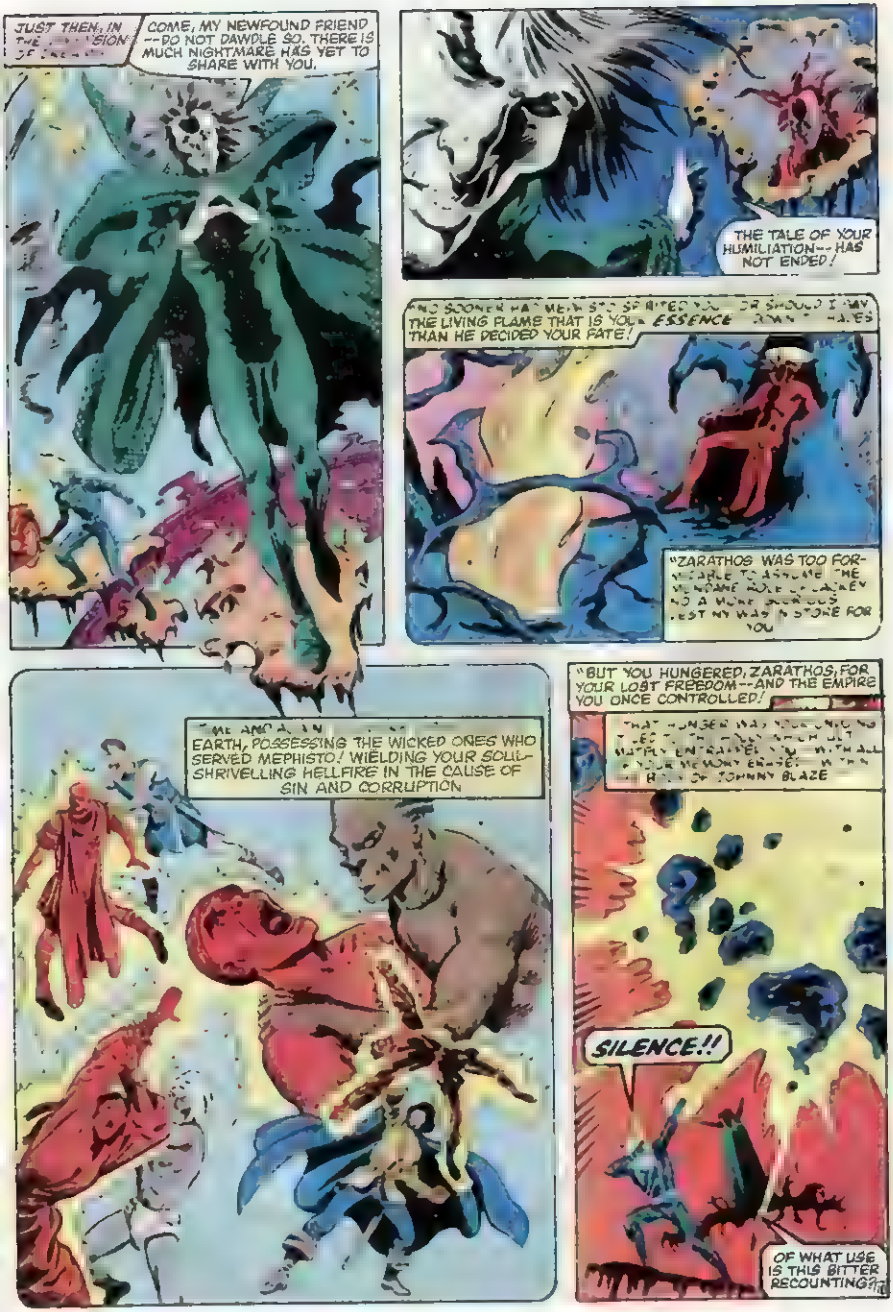
JUST THEN, IN THE [illegible] OF [illegible]
COME, MY NEWFOUND FRIEND --DO NOT DAWDLE SO. THERE IS MUCH NIGHTMARE HAS YET TO SHARE WITH YOU.
THE TALE OF YOUR HUMILIATION--HAS NOT ENDED!
[illegible] SOONER HAD [illegible] SPLINTERED YOU [illegible] OR SHOULD I SAY THE LIVING FLAME THAT IS YOUR ESSENCE [illegible] THAN HE DECIDED YOUR FATE!
"ZARATHOS WAS TOO FORMIDABLE TO ASSUAGE THE MERCHANT MOLE OF LUCIFER NO A MORE SHREWDLY JEST MY WAS IN STORE FOR YOU
[illegible] AND AGAIN EARTH, POSSESSING THE WICKED ONES WHO SERVED MEPHISTO! WIELDING YOUR SOUL-SHRIVELLING HELLFIRE IN THE CAUSE OF SIN AND CORRUPTION
"BUT YOU HUNGERED, ZARATHOS, FOR YOUR LOST FREEDOM--AND THE EMPIRE YOU ONCE CONTROLLED!
[illegible] HUNGER WAS [illegible] [illegible] MUTELY ENTRAPPED [illegible] WITH ALL [illegible] MONY ENDED. [illegible] OF JOHNNY BLAZE
SILENCE!!
OF WHAT USE IS THIS BITTER RECOUNTING?

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OF GREAT USE! YOU MUST RELIVE ALL THE GRANDEUR AND IGNOMINY YOU MUST KNOW FULL WELL WHAT YOU WERE AND WHAT YOU ARE-- BEFORE I SET YOU FREE!
FREE?
YES, GHOST RIDER! I CAN GRANT THE FREEDOM THAT HAS EVER ELUDED YOU
I AM THE MASTER OF DREAMS! THE EMPIRE OF SLEEP IS MINE TO WORK AS CLAY BETWEEN MY FINGERS
TOGETHER WE SHALL ENSNARE YOUR HUMAN HOST IN HIS OWN DREAMS! WE SHALL TRAP HIM FOREVER IN A NIGHTMARE PLUCKED FROM THE PITS OF HIS SUBCONSCIOUS AND THEN, ZARATHOS--
BLAZE'S MORTAL BODY SHALL BE YOURS!
YES
YES.
YESSSSS!!
..WHAT IS IT, DEMON? WHY DO YOU SUDDENLY START AND TREMBLE SO?
I FEEL THE CALL FROM BLAZE'S MIND! THERE IS EVIL AFOOT! VENGEANCE TO BE EXACTED! FOR THE FIRST TIME--
--BLAZE IS BEGGING ME TO COME OUT!
AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME, YOU MUST-- RESIST!
RESIST? I CANNOT!
TO WALK THE EARTH, TO PUNISH THE GUILTY, IS THE SOLE JOY ALLOWED ME IN THIS BARREN EXISTENCE!
YOU WILL HAVE MORE DARKLING JOYS THAN YOU HAVE EVER DARED IMAGINE-- IF YOU HEED MY WORDS --AND RESIST!
FOR THERE IS MUCH TO PONDER-- MUCH TO PLAN-- BEFORE BLAZE SURRENDERS TO SLEEP--
--FOR THE FINAL TIME!

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SEVERAL MINUTES EARLIER, ACROSS THE DIMENSIONAL GULFS..
YOU CAN'T MEAN IT, RENALDO!
YOU C-CAN'T BE SO ...INHUMAN!
AN ODD COMMENT, BLAZE--
"--COMING FROM ONE WHO IS THE MOST INHUMAN OF--"
--ALL?!
YOU'RE FREE!
BLASTED RIGHT I'M FREE!
YOUR D-DOCTORS WERE SLOPPY. LEFT A SCALPEL WHERE I COULD REACH IT...
I-I MAY BE DRUGGED, RENALDO -- BUT I'M NOT OUT YET!
YOU RE GONNA PAY, SCUM -- FOR WHAT YOU DID TO OLD MAN QUENTIN.. TO V-VINCENZO
YOU'RE GONNA PAY!
STOP HIM! STOP HIM!
20

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GHOST WRITERS!

% MARVEL COMICS GROUP
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New York, New York 10016

TOM DeFALCO
EDITOR
LINDA GRANT
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Tom,

I picked up the last few issues of GHOST RIDER because I had the money and was curious about this book. Now I'm hooked — and #73 was the one that did it! This entire issue grabbed me, from the superb cover by Budiansky and Simons to the last page. The intense psychological conflict between Johnny Blaze and the Ghost Rider, the fact that Eliot really is reformed, Ghost Rider's attacking an innocent man, and Red's finally telling Johnny he knows his secret, all make this issue stand out.

Mostly, though, it's the fact that Roger Stern presents the characters as real, fallible human beings. Even the demon can succumb to human emotions ("My curse is your curse, eh?). I love it! Okay, you've got me hooked. I may not be a fan yet, but I sure am interested! Now, what are you going to do about it?

Geoff Schmidt
160 Rear Grove St.
Wellesley, MA 02181

Just watch!

Dear Tom,

For a long time I was considering giving up on GHOST RIDER because I found it getting too mean and vicious. It wasn't a pleasure to read. But the last few issues have totally changed my outlook on this book.

With "Freaks" I wondered how GHOST RIDER could get any better. I found out with "Tears of a Clown". You people have again outdone yourselves.

I'd always thought of Johnny as being cursed with the Ghost Rider, not the other way around. However, I don't think I feel as sorry for the Ghost Rider as I do for Johnny Blaze. I'm glad that Red Fowler knows Johnny's secret and that Johnny knows that he's not alone anymore. Keep it up, people. You can't go wrong if you do.

Michelle M. Clement
1220 Perry St.
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Dear Tom,

GHOST RIDER #73 was excellent! The artwork by Budiansky and Simons was the greatest. The scenes where Johnny Blaze talks to the Ghost Rider are sensational. And the action . . I haven't seen action like that in a comic book since MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #5. In short, once I read the first page, I was hypnotized and couldn't put it down. GHOST RIDER is the best comic I've ever read.

Mike Caiazzo
240 Golf View Rd.
Ardmore, PA

That's my goal, Mike!

Dear Tom:

A letter in issue #73 made me think about why I like the Ghost Rider, and what makes him so strangely appealing. James Troost wrote that, "The Ghost Rider is the biggest jerk in comics. I hate his guts." Now he is entitled to his opinion, but what shocked me was your response: "...you're supposed to hate Ghost Rider's guts!" Well, let me tell you why I like the Ghost Rider.

I enjoy reading about a character who, when he perceives an evil, doesn't pontificate with those clichéd, self-consciously noble statements like, "It is not our responsibility to judge," or "We must turn him over to the proper authorities, whatever we think," or "Yes, he can flame-broil the Multiverse with a stray thought and probably will. . but he's still a living being." Oh yes, I can understand the rationale for that code of behavior, and intellectually, I quite agree with it. But, on an emotional, gut level, it is cathartic to see someone like the Ghost Rider who knows evil when he sees it and is perfectly, unquestioningly confident of his ability to judge and his power to punish.

I think the reason this is appealing is that Ghost Rider is not just the "embodiment of vengeance" — something rather abstract — but he also speaks to, and in some way incarnates, the personal revenge desires in each of us. Anyone who's been threatened with a knife, ever seen vandals gleefully destroy a thing of beauty, ever lost a friend to the trigger-finger of a nervous thief, or even been taunted by a schoolyard bully — knows the desire, the savage need for revenge, and knows the killing frustration of being unable to satisfy it.

It is that part of each individual one of us that Ghost Rider embodies. GR is an accurately-observed rendering of a portion of the human (and a human) psyche, and, if I may try some armchair psychology, my guess is that the violence of a person's dislike for the Ghost Rider is probably a measure of the vehemence with which that person would like to deny that part of his own self. Johnny's frequent agonizing over where his own desires end, and the Ghost Rider's begin, demonstrates this psychological state admirably.

Of course, the Ghost Rider is by no means amiable. His purpose (nay, his sole reason for being) leaves little room for mercy, even for mitigating circumstances (Eliot probably doesn't deserve the soul-burning he gets in #73). As a demon, the Ghost Rider does not adhere to human rules of conduct and enjoys rampaging, frightening mortals, guilty or no. But, I don't think you have to, or are meant to, hate him. In any case, I commend all associated with GHOST RIDER for their work on this interesting and atypical book.

Christopher Combest
18 Edward Avenue
Old Bridge, NJ 08857

I don't agree with all of your insights, Chris, but you've certainly given us all a lot to think about.

Dear Tom,

I could not believe it — in issue #73 Johnny Blaze and Ghost Rider have a real conversation! Ghost Rider actually called Blaze "Johnny". Could it be true that GR is taking over Blaze's body? Also, Red Fowler told both Ghost Rider and Johnny that he knows about their curse. I think Johnny has found a real friend. I also really loved the cover by Budiansky and Simons.

GHOST RIDER is the only comic I follow. I started collecting it with #49 and have not missed an issue yet. This book keeps getting better all the time, but #73 is the best issue I have ever read.

Gene Mott
1602 W. Buckeye Lane
Tucson, AZ 85705

Dear Tom,

I must admit that I haven't looked sideways at a copy of GHOST RIDER since #36. I don't know why I picked it up, maybe because of the new logo. Anyway, I was caught totally unprepared by the quality of issue #73. If this is the new standard, you can count me in!

Rob Blackburn
4601 Buford Way
Chamblee, GA 30341

It is — and I will!

Dear Tom:

I just finished reading GHOST RIDER #73. I liked it very much, but I feel very sorry for Johnny Blaze. I mean, give the guy a break — Ghost Rider is just getting too powerful! Now, he can even make mental images and carry on conversations with Johnny. And he keeps desperately trying to break free.

Mike Meyer
6364 Thompson Road
Cincinatti, OH 45247

What do you expect him to do, Mike?

Dear Tom,

I knew Ghost Rider was mean, but I still liked him. Until issue #73, that is. When I first started reading this issue, everything was okay, and GR was frying only the bad guys. But then, as usual, he got one of the good guys. Why did it have to be the clown?

On page 20 you showed how Ghost Rider's cold flame affected the clown, and I thought it was great. You made us understand just how the clown felt then. But, that still doesn't make the Ghost Rider any better!

Bill Puckett
6000 Pleasant Valley Road
Camden, OH 45311

No, it doesn't!

Tom DeFalco

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BULLPEN BULLETINS

STAN LEE—

fearless Publisher, Presenter, and Creative Director of Mighty Marvel called me up from his office out in Los Angeles today. He thought he'd take out a few minutes from being a Hollywood Mogul to check in with me, your large, menacing-looking, ornery-but-basically-lovable Editor-in-Chief—just to see how the comics were doing. Well, I was delighted to tell him that the comics are doing *great!* This is our best year *ever!*

Needless to say, Stan was thoroughly impressed,– but, he said something that made me very proud to know him. He said, "Jim, I love to hear that sales are good, but sometimes good sales can be a short-term fluke – what I really care about is whether or not the *comics* are good. If the comics are good, **sales** will take care of themselves." My sentiments exactly! Anyway, since Stan is a little behind in his reading, being that he's a busy film biz exec and all, I proceeded to tell him all about what's been going on in all our current titles, what's going on now, and all the daring, exciting developments I've got planned. When I finished, he was ecstatic! He said, "Jim, what you've got in the works is fantastic! It's the best plotting I've ever heard – the kind of stuff that makes Marvel number one! I'm absolutely delighted!"

I feel like a million bucks!

WHICH BRINGS UP...

...the rumor of the month. It seems that some strange folks out there have been spreading the weird notion that we here at The House of Ideas are planning to make all sorts of drastic, destructive changes, tearing down everything we've built up over the years on a number of our top titles – even killing off a passel of Marvel stars!

What balderdash!

Change, of course, is the essence of what makes the Marvel Universe come alive – and I'll be darned if I'll ever let things stagnate here. There are *enough* Dull Comics in the world without any Marvel titles slipping back into their ranks. I'm not *crazy*, though .. at least not in a hero-destructive way.

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A PROBLEM SOLVED!

Since I seem to be having a lot of trouble finding time to take a vacation – or sleep, or eat, or do anything but my job, I recently decided to combine a couple of little vacations with some work.

Two weeks ago, superstar artist/writer Jim Starlin invited a bunch of us up to his beautiful upstate New York home. Among those present were artist Berni Wrightson and his wife, colorist Michelle Brand, artist Carl Potts, artist/writer Bob Layton, colorist Christie Scheele, and of course, Jim Starlin and his wife, painter Dana Grazziunas. We all played racquetball at Jim's club, the Tiger Fitness Center in nearby Kingston, ate a magnificent meal at Rudi's, a renowned area restaurant, picnicked on Jim's huge lawn, and enjoyed the Adirondack scenery. In between things, I wrote a few memos, answered some important mail, consulted with Jim about his new *Dreadstar* series, worked out a deal with Berni to do a cover for an upcoming Dr Strange Special Edition reprint, and signed Bob to a Spider-Man Graphic Novel contract!

Last week, I met star scripter David Michelinie and ace inker Brett Breeding in Atlantic City for two days. We stayed in luxury at Caesar's Regency Hyatt on the Boardwalk, ate in several terrific restaurants, gambled a little, and in general enjoyed the resort facilities. In between things, I wrote a treatment for a possible TV show that I can't tell you about yet, answered some business questions of Brett's, and worked out an Avengers Graphic Novel plot with Dave.

Now *that's* how to work!

ATTENTION COMIC SHOP OWNERS!

We'd like to help our readers find your stores. If you'd like your store's name and location mentioned in an upcoming special edition of this column, write to:

Carol Kalish
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387 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10016

NEXT MONTH...

I'm *really* going to take a break. Watch this space for our first *Guest Columnist!*

Hang in there.

THE HYPE BOX

ROM #30 — Written by [illegible] MANTLO. Breakdowns by SAL BUSCEMA. Finishes by IAN AKIN and BRIAN [illegible]. Just when you've [illegible] adventure of the [illegible], [illegible] — [illegible] as [illegible] and [illegible] the Master of Magnetism. Pat and [illegible] engage in the [illegible] Aaun and Garvey, [illegible] the [illegible] is [illegible] fired. But don't [illegible] our mind — [illegible] it for yourself!

VISION AND SCARLET WITCH (Limited Series) #4 — Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by RICK LEONARDI. Inks by IAN AKIN and BRIAN [illegible]. The awesome [illegible] in the last issue escalates into the ultimate adversary confrontation! Magneto! And he means to bring about Queen Wanda's [illegible] Wish in some weird [illegible] But that's only a small part of this month's goings-on!

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE #2 — This month: From the "B's" through the "Destroyer Man". The second issue of the most [illegible] [illegible] ever put between two covers! Packed into over [illegible] pages are [illegible] of [illegible] and [illegible] of [illegible] and [illegible]. It's a more [illegible] fully comprehensive [illegible] and entertaining [illegible] Organized and edited by MARK GRUENWALD.

THE MIGHTY MARVEL CHECKLIST

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #96 — The Thing, Daredevil, the X-Men and more!
TEAM AMERICA #4
SPIDER-WOMAN #45
DAZZLER #24
KA-ZAR #23
DARE OF YR. #101
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #237
CAPTAIN AMERICA #278
THOR #328
MICRONAUTS #59
GHOST RIDER #77
MOON KNIGHT #26
INDIANA JONES #2
DOCTOR STRANGE #3
INCREDIBLE HULK #280
AVENGERS #228
CONAN #149
MARVEL TALES #148 — Reprinting *AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #11*. The Return of Doctor Octopus — by STAN LEE and STEVE DITKO
X-MEN #100 — Special *double-sized* issue!
ROM #30
POWER MAN IRON FIST #89
VISION SCARLET WITCH (Limited Series) #4 — The awesome conclusion!
G.I. JOE #6
FANTASTIC FOUR #251
MARVEL TEAM-UP #136 — Spider-Man and the Hulk Plus Luke Cage and the Son of Satan
IRON MAN #167
PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #75 — Special *double-sized* issue
DEFENDERS #116
STAR WARS #88
MASTER OF KUNG FU #121
WHAT IF #37
THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE #2

MARVEL MAGAZINES

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #84

SPECIAL EVENTS

X-MEN SPECIAL EDITION #1 – Reprinting the very first appearance of the New X-Men, plus an all-new story starring Kitty Pryde by CHRIS CLAREMONT and JACK [illegible]
WARLOCK #3 — by JIM [illegible]

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An adventure
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Dark Crystal
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A THEATRE NEAR YOU

DON'T LET HIM NEAR ME!!
BLAZE STRUGGLES FIERCELY, FRANTICALLY
BUT THE NARCOTICS ASSAILING HIM FROM WITHIN, COMBINED WITH THE MOB OF FREAKS' ATTACK HIS FOO W WITHOUT SOON PROVE TOO MUCH!
HE STARES POINT-BLANK INTO A SEA OF TWISTED FACES INTO THE DEPTHS OF HATE-CRAZED EYES AND SEES HIS OWN HIDEOUS FATE REFLECTED THERE
AND, FOR PERHAPS THE FIRST TIME, JOHNNY BLAZE REALIZES THAT THERE MAY BE PERSONAL HELLS...
FAR WORSE THAN HIS!
YOU'RE NOT GONNA MUTILATE ME, RENALDO--
--AND THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO ENSURE YOU WON'T!
"I'M SETTING THE GHOST RIDER FREE!"
NOOOOO!!

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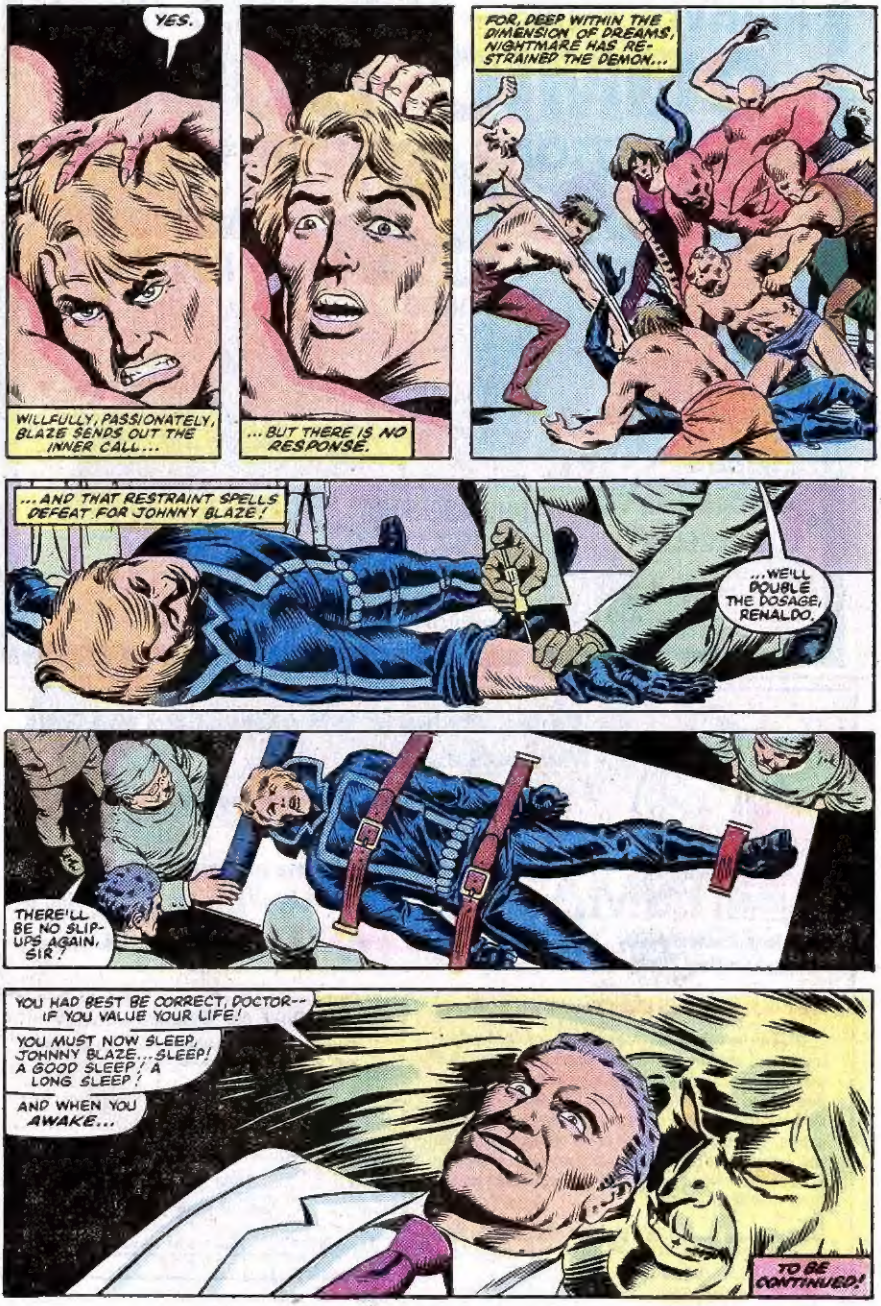
YES.
WILLFULLY, PASSIONATELY, BLAZE SENDS OUT THE INNER CALL...
...BUT THERE IS NO RESPONSE.
FOR, DEEP WITHIN THE DIMENSION OF DREAMS, NIGHTMARE HAS RESTRAINED THE DEMON...
...AND THAT RESTRAINT SPELLS DEFEAT FOR JOHNNY BLAZE!
...WE'LL DOUBLE THE DOSAGE, RENALDO.
THERE'LL BE NO SLIP-UPS AGAIN, SIR!
YOU HAD BEST BE CORRECT, DOCTOR--IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE!
YOU MUST NOW SLEEP, JOHNNY BLAZE...SLEEP! A GOOD SLEEP! A LONG SLEEP!
AND WHEN YOU AWAKE...
TO BE CONTINUED!

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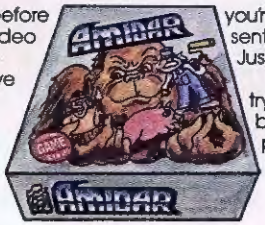

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